I. Concerns from Fellow Catholics

This section addresses concerns raised by Catholics who love the Church, desire fidelity to truth, and worry that openness

These concerns deserve to be taken seriously. They arise not from malice, but from a genuine desire to protect the integr

At the same time, some of these concerns reflect habits of posture that can drift away from the example of Christ Himself

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Concern 1: “This sounds like relativism.”

What this concern gets right:
Relativism is incompatible with Christianity. Truth is not subjective, interchangeable, or negotiable. Jesus does not preser

Catholics are right to be alert to language that blurs real differences or treats all beliefs as equally true.

What the Open Table does *not* say:
The Open Table does not claim:
- that all religions are equally true
- that doctrine is optional
- that contradiction can coexist with truth
- that conviction must be muted for the sake of peace

Hospitality is not relativism. Listening is not surrender. Dialogue is not denial.

Clarification:
Relativism dissolves truth.
Hospitality presupposes truth.

Jesus ate with sinners not because sin was unreal, but because *conversion begins with encounter*. The Open Table ad

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Concern 2: “Why are other religions spoken of so respectfully?”

What this concern gets right:
Error should not be celebrated.
Truth should not be obscured.
The Church must never pretend that contradictory claims about God are equally valid.

What the Open Table does *not* say:
It does not affirm other religions as salvifically complete in themselves.
It does not deny the uniqueness of Christ or the Church.
It does not replace proclamation with affirmation.

Clarification:
Respect is not endorsement.

The Church has long taught that truth and goodness can be found outside her visible boundaries without negating her cla

Christ did not begin conversations by cataloging error. He began by recognizing dignity.

Concern 3: “Where is repentance, sin, and conversion?”

What this concern gets right:
Christianity without repentance is not Christianity.
Sin is real. Conversion is necessary.
Grace heals what is broken; it does not pretend brokenness does not exist.

What the Open Table does *not* do:
It does not deny sin.
It does not redefine repentance out of existence.
It does not replace conversion with coexistence.

Clarification:
The Open Table is not catechesis.
It is not the full Gospel presentation.
It is the *threshold*.

Jesus did not demand repentance as a prerequisite for presence. He called people *from within relationship*. The Open T

Concern 4: “This puts Catholics on the same level as error.”

What this concern gets right:
Truth is not democratic.
Authority is not evenly distributed.
The Church does not derive her identity from consensus.

What the Open Table does *not* say:
It does not deny the Church’s teaching authority.
It does not flatten doctrinal hierarchy.
It does not place Catholicism alongside other beliefs as merely one voice among many.

Clarification:
Humility of posture does not equal equality of claims.

Standing at the same table does not mean standing on the same foundation. Christ knelt to wash feet without relinquishin

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Concern 5: “Why not be more explicit about the Church being the one true Church?”

What this concern gets right:
The Church is not shy about her identity.
She does not exist merely as a dialogue partner, but as the Body of Christ.

What the Open Table does *not* deny:
It does not deny the Church’s claim to fullness of truth.
It does not suggest that clarity must be postponed indefinitely.

Clarification:
There is a difference between *hiding* truth and *sequencing* its presentation.
Jesus revealed Himself progressively. He spoke in parables. He asked questions. He waited for readiness.

The Open Table follows that pedagogy—not out of fear, but out of fidelity to how Christ actually taught.

A Re-centering for Catholics

Catholic confidence is strongest when it is least defensive.

The Church does not need to shout to be heard.
She does not need to dominate to be faithful.
She does not need to stand above others to proclaim Christ.

If this work unsettles us, the question worth asking is not,
“Is this lowering the faith?”
but rather,
“Does this resemble how Christ actually moved through the world?”

Where Catholics May Still Disagree

Faithful Catholics may disagree about:
- methods of evangelization
- tone and sequencing
- pastoral strategy

Those disagreements are legitimate.

This work does not demand uniformity of approach. It offers one path—rooted in hospitality, clarity, and confidence—for e

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Closing Orientation for This Section

The Open Table does not ask Catholics to abandon doctrine.
It asks us to abandon fear.

Truth does not need protection from conversation.
It needs witnesses who resemble Christ.

II. Concerns from Other Christians

This section addresses concerns raised by Christians outside the Catholic Church—those who confess Jesus Christ as L

These concerns are understandable. Christian division has a long and painful history, and many believers have experienc

This section does not attempt to resolve centuries of disagreement. It seeks only to clarify posture, intent, and boundaries

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A. Concerns from Trinitarian Protestants

Concern 1: “This avoids the Gospel.”

What this concern gets right:
The Gospel is central.
Any Christian work that obscures Christ’s saving death and resurrection risks losing its anchor.

Protestants are right to be wary of approaches that substitute vague spirituality for the proclamation of Christ crucified.

What the Open Table does *not* do:
It does not deny the Gospel.
It does not replace Christ with moralism or sentiment.
It does not suggest that hospitality is a substitute for salvation.

Clarification:
The Open Table is not a Gospel *presentation*; it is a Gospel *posture*.

Jesus did not proclaim the full meaning of the Cross to strangers at the outset. He taught, healed, questioned, ate, and lis

This work follows that same sequence.

Concern 2: “This feels Catholic-centric but disguised.”

What this concern gets right:
Catholics should not pretend to speak from a neutral theological position.
Authentic dialogue requires honesty about identity.

What the Open Table does *not* do:
It does not hide Catholic convictions.
It does not deny real disagreements about authority, sacraments, or ecclesiology.
It does not claim a lowest-common-denominator Christianity.

Clarification:
Speaking gently is not the same as speaking deceptively.

The Open Table is written from within Catholic conviction, but it does not weaponize that conviction against others. It invit

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Concern 3: “Why is justification by faith not emphasized more clearly?”

What this concern gets right:
Salvation is a gift of grace, not a human achievement.
Faith is central to Christian life.

What the Open Table does *not* deny:
It does not deny grace.
It does not deny the necessity of faith.
It does not teach salvation by works.

Clarification:
Different Christian traditions emphasize different entry points into the same mystery.

The Open Table is not structured as a doctrinal comparison. It is structured as an invitation to encounter Christ in a fragm

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B. Concerns from Non-Trinitarian Christians

This includes communities who honor Jesus as Messiah, prophet, or uniquely anointed teacher, but do not affirm Trinitari

Concern: “This assumes doctrines we do not accept.”

What this concern gets right:
Doctrinal assumptions matter.
Christians do not all mean the same thing when they speak about Jesus.

What the Open Table does *not* do:
It does not pretend doctrinal differences are minor.
It does not obscure the Catholic understanding of Christ.
It does not require agreement as a condition for dialogue.

Clarification:
An invitation does not presume acceptance.

The Open Table acknowledges that some readers will fundamentally disagree with its claims. It still extends hospitality, c

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C. Concerns from Orthodox Christians

Concern 1: “This feels modern, Western, or overly pastoral.”

What this concern gets right:
Christianity is not a modern invention.
The faith is rooted in mystery, asceticism, and reverence.

Orthodox Christians are rightly cautious of approaches that flatten theology into accessibility.

What the Open Table does *not* do:
It does not deny mystery.
It does not reject tradition.
It does not claim novelty as virtue.
Clarification:

Hospitality is not a modern innovation.

From the earliest centuries, Christians understood the table as a place of encounter, reconciliation, and revelation. The O

Concern 2: “Dialogue risks doctrinal erosion.”

What this concern gets right:
Truth must be guarded.
The faith is not infinitely flexible.

What the Open Table does *not* do:
It does not negotiate doctrine.
It does not redefine Christ.
It does not suggest unity without truth.

Clarification:
Dialogue does not erode doctrine unless doctrine is already insecure.

Christ engaged pagans, philosophers, and skeptics without losing Himself. His Church is capable of the same confidence

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A Shared Re-centering for All Christians

Christian unity is not achieved by pretending we agree.
Nor is it preserved by refusing to speak.

The Open Table assumes that:
- Christ is worth speaking about
- human beings are worth listening to
- truth is strong enough to endure conversation

This work does not ask Christians to abandon their convictions. It asks us to resemble Christ not only in what we say, but

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Where Disagreement Will Remain

Christians may continue to disagree about:
- authority
- sacraments
- ecclesial structure
- doctrine

This document does not attempt to resolve those differences.

It seeks only to remove unnecessary hostility so that disagreement can exist without contempt.

Closing Orientation for This Section

The credibility of Christianity is shaped not only by what Christians believe, but by how we treat one another.

If Christ is Lord, then fear has no rightful place at the table.

III. Concerns from Our Jewish Friends

This section addresses concerns commonly raised by Jewish readers when encountering Christian invitations to dialogue

These concerns are not theoretical. They arise from centuries of lived experience, historical trauma, theological disagreem

Any honest invitation must begin by acknowledging that reality.

Concern 1: “This is just another form of supersessionism.”

What this concern gets right:
Supersessionism—the idea that Judaism is obsolete, erased, or invalidated by Christianity—has caused deep harm. Whe

Jewish suspicion of Christian language about “fulfillment” is not paranoia; it is learned caution.

What the Open Table does *not* say:
It does not claim that Judaism is nullified.
It does not deny the Jewish people’s covenantal relationship with God.
It does not frame Jews as incomplete Christians-in-waiting.

Clarification:
Christian belief in Jesus as Messiah does not require contempt for Judaism.

The Open Table speaks from Christian conviction without attempting to overwrite Jewish self-understanding. It acknowled

Dialogue here does not mean agreement. It means honesty without hostility.

Concern 2: “Jesus is presented as fulfillment rather than as a Jewish teacher.”

What this concern gets right:
Jesus was Jewish.
He lived, taught, and argued within Jewish tradition.
Christian readings that detach Him from Judaism distort history and theology alike.

What the Open Table does *not* do:
It does not strip Jesus of His Jewish identity.
It does not present Judaism as merely preparatory or deficient.
It does not deny that Jewish interpretations of Scripture remain internally coherent.

Clarification:
Christians believe Jesus fulfills the Law and the Prophets—but that belief does not grant Christians the authority to define

The Open Table names Jesus honestly as Christians understand Him, while respecting that Jewish readers do not share

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Concern 3: “Dialogue is often a cover for conversion.”

What this concern gets right:

Historically, dialogue has too often been manipulative.
Hospitality has sometimes been weaponized.
“Conversation” has sometimes meant pressure.

Jewish resistance to Christian invitations is not stubbornness—it is memory.

What the Open Table explicitly rejects:
Coercion.
Deception.
Emotional manipulation.
Targeting vulnerability as an evangelistic tactic.

Clarification:
An invitation can be declined.

The Open Table does not presume acceptance, nor does it treat refusal as failure. It seeks conversation rooted in dignity

Christians may hope that others come to see Jesus as they do—but hope is not the same as strategy.

Concern 4: “This ignores historical wounds.”

What this concern gets right:
Words do not erase history.
Good intentions do not undo harm.
Silence about the past deepens mistrust.

What the Open Table does *not* do:
It does not deny Christian complicity in Jewish suffering.
It does not minimize persecution, exclusion, or violence.
It does not ask Jewish readers to “move on” for the sake of harmony.

Clarification:
Acknowledging wounds is not self-flagellation; it is truth-telling.

This work assumes that reconciliation begins not with theological agreement, but with the humility to name where harm o

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Where Disagreement Is Honest and Expected

This document does not pretend that:
- Jews and Christians share the same understanding of Messiah
- Jesus will be recognized as Christ through dialogue alone
- theological reconciliation is imminent or guaranteed

Some disagreements remain foundational.

Respecting those differences does not weaken Christian faith. It honors Jewish integrity.

A Word of Posture

The Open Table does not ask Jewish readers to abandon their tradition.
It does not frame Judaism as a problem to be solved.
It does not require shared conclusions to justify shared humanity.

It simply offers a space where conversation may occur without erasure, pressure, or pretense.

Closing Orientation for This Section

If dialogue between Jews and Christians is to mean anything, it must begin with listening that does not rush to resolution.

The Open Table seeks that beginning—and leaves the ending in God’s hands.

IV. Concerns from Our Muslim Friends

This section addresses concerns raised by Muslim readers—across Sunni, Shia, and other Islamic traditions—who encou

These concerns are not abstract. They arise from long histories of theological disagreement, political conflict, colonial ent

Any honest invitation must take those realities seriously.

A. General Concerns from Muslim Readers

Concern 1: “Christians misunderstand Islam.”

What this concern gets right:
Islam is often misrepresented in Western discourse.
Muslims are frequently caricatured as violent, irrational, or oppressive.
Complex theological and legal traditions are reduced to headlines.

Muslim frustration with Christian ignorance is justified.

What the Open Table does *not* do:
It does not reduce Islam to extremism.
It does not dismiss Islamic theology as primitive or irrational.
It does not treat Muslims as enemies or projects.

Clarification:
Respect begins with accuracy.

The Open Table acknowledges Islam as a serious religious tradition with deep commitments to prayer, moral discipline, c

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Concern 2: “Jesus is elevated beyond what Islam allows.”

What this concern gets right:
Islam holds Jesus (■■s■) in high regard as a prophet and messenger of God.
Islam rejects any claim that compromises divine unity (taw■■d).
The divinity of Christ is seen as a fundamental theological error.

What the Open Table does *not* do:
It does not mock or dismiss Islamic reverence for Jesus.
It does not pretend that Christians and Muslims agree about His nature.
It does not blur real doctrinal divides.

Clarification:
Respect does not require agreement.

The Open Table names Jesus as Christians understand Him, while acknowledging that Muslims do not and will not accep

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Concern 3: “Dialogue is just a softer form of proselytization.”

What this concern gets right:
Muslims have often experienced Christian outreach as manipulative or dismissive.
Dialogue has sometimes been a prelude to pressure rather than understanding.

What the Open Table explicitly rejects:
Coercion.
Deception.
Exploitation of vulnerability.

Clarification:
An invitation is not an ambush.

The Open Table does not assume acceptance, nor does it treat refusal as failure. It recognizes that faith cannot be coerc

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B. Concerns from Sunni Muslim Readers

Concern 1: “Christianity confuses submission with sonship.”

What this concern gets right:
Islam emphasizes obedience, humility, and submission to God’s will.
Any theology that appears to compromise God’s transcendence is suspect.

What the Open Table does *not* do:
It does not trivialize submission.
It does not portray obedience as inferior to intimacy.
It does not dismiss Islamic piety.

Clarification:
Christianity and Islam differ not in reverence for God, but in how closeness to God is understood.

Christians speak of sonship not as biological relation, but as participation in divine life through grace. This claim is founda

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Concern 2: “Christian moral authority is compromised.”

What this concern gets right:
Christian societies have often failed to embody Christian ethics.
Moral inconsistency undermines credibility.

What the Open Table does *not* do:
It does not deny Christian moral failure.
It does not claim civilizational superiority.

Clarification:
Christianity does not judge itself by Christians at their worst, but by Christ Himself.

The Open Table invites Muslims to engage Christianity at its source, not merely through its historical abuses.

C. Concerns from Shia Muslim Readers

Concern 1: “Christianity does not take suffering and injustice seriously enough.”

What this concern gets right:
Shia Islam carries a deep theology of suffering, martyrdom, and resistance to injustice.
Memory, sacrifice, and loyalty shape Shia religious consciousness.

What the Open Table does *not* do:
It does not dismiss suffering as incidental.
It does not trivialize historical trauma.
It does not spiritualize injustice away.

Clarification:
Christianity places suffering at the center of its story.

The Cross is not an afterthought. It is the axis of Christian faith. While Christianity and Shia Islam interpret suffering differ

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Concern 2: “Christian authority structures are alien.”

What this concern gets right:
Authority matters.
Lineage, witness, and faithfulness shape legitimacy.

What the Open Table does *not* do:
It does not deny the importance of authority.
It does not present Christianity as purely individualistic.

Clarification:
Christianity grounds authority not in lineage alone, but in apostolic witness shaped by sacrifice and fidelity.

This difference is real and unresolved—but it need not be hostile.

Where Disagreement Is Clear and Expected

This document does not pretend that:
- Christians and Muslims worship God in identical ways
- Jesus can be understood the same way within both traditions
- theological reconciliation is likely through dialogue alone

Some differences remain absolute.

Dialogue does not erase them. It humanizes those who hold them.

A Word of Posture

The Open Table does not ask Muslims to abandon Islam.
It does not dismiss Islamic devotion.
It does not assume superiority of character or discipline.

It offers conversation without contempt—and leaves judgment to God.

Closing Orientation for This Section

Peaceful dialogue does not require theological surrender.
It requires humility strong enough to listen without fear.

The Open Table seeks that humility.

V. Concerns from Hindu, Buddhist, and Taoist Readers

This section addresses concerns likely to arise from readers shaped by Hindu, Buddhist, or Taoist traditions—religious ar

These traditions often approach ultimate reality, suffering, selfhood, and liberation in ways fundamentally distinct from the

The Open Table does not collapse those differences. It acknowledges them from the beginning.

A Shared Concern: “Christianity assumes a personal, exclusive God.”

What this concern gets right

Christianity is particular.
It claims that ultimate reality is personal.
It claims that history matters.
It claims that salvation is not self-generated but given.

These are not minor claims. They shape the entire Christian worldview.

For traditions that understand ultimate reality as impersonal (or transpersonal), cyclical, or beyond personal categories alt

That concern is understandable.

What the Open Table does *not* do

It does not:
- dismiss impersonal metaphysics as foolish
- pretend that all spiritual language refers to the same reality
- reduce Eastern traditions to “seeking what Christianity already found”
- claim that philosophical sophistication lies only in the West

Clarification

Christianity does not begin with abstraction.
It begins with encounter.

The Christian claim is not that ultimate reality is one option among many. It is that ultimate reality has acted in history in a

The Open Table names that tension without disguising it.

A Shared Concern: “Why insist on incarnation rather than inner realization?”

What this concern gets right

Many Eastern traditions emphasize:
- awakening
- enlightenment
- harmony
- realization of deeper reality

- liberation from illusion or attachment

Christian language about incarnation, atonement, and salvation through another can seem to diminish the role of disciplin

What the Open Table does *not* do

It does not:
- deny the value of discipline or contemplation
- dismiss meditation or ascetic practice
- reject the idea that human transformation requires effort

Clarification

Christianity does not deny transformation. It denies that transformation originates solely from within the self.

Where some traditions seek liberation from illusion, Christianity seeks reconciliation within reality.

Where some traditions seek dissolution of ego, Christianity seeks restoration of personhood.

These are not cosmetic differences. They are structural differences—and the Open Table does not pretend otherwise.

Concerns Specific to Hindu Readers

Concern: “Christian exclusivity ignores the multiplicity of paths.”

What this concern gets right:
Hindu traditions encompass a wide range of philosophical schools and devotional expressions. Plurality is not accidental;

Christian insistence on a singular incarnate revelation can appear dismissive of spiritual diversity.

What the Open Table does *not* do:
It does not claim that Hindu traditions lack depth or seriousness.
It does not caricature polytheism or non-dualism.
It does not reduce complex theology to idol worship.

Clarification:
Christianity does not deny spiritual longing across cultures.
It claims that longing finds its fulfillment in a particular person.

This claim will not be persuasive to everyone. It is offered honestly, not aggressively.

Concerns Specific to Buddhist Readers

Concern: “Christianity centers self and permanence rather than non-attachment.”

What this concern gets right:
Buddhist thought often emphasizes impermanence, suffering, and release from attachment. Christian language about ete

What the Open Table does *not* do:

It does not dismiss Buddhist insight into suffering.
It does not deny the seriousness of desire and attachment.
It does not equate nirvana with heaven.

Clarification:
Christianity and Buddhism diagnose the human condition differently.

Buddhism often sees suffering as rooted in craving and illusion.
Christianity sees suffering as rooted in rupture and alienation.

Both traditions take suffering seriously. They do not agree on its cause or cure.

Dialogue does not require pretending those diagnoses are the same.

Concerns Specific to Taoist Readers

Concern: “Christianity imposes structure rather than harmony.”

What this concern gets right:
Taoist thought often emphasizes balance, flow, and non-coercive action. Christian moral frameworks can appear rigid or

What the Open Table does *not* do:
It does not dismiss harmony as naive.
It does not portray spontaneity as chaos.
It does not equate moral clarity with domination.

Clarification:
Christianity affirms order—but not control.
It affirms truth—but not coercion.

The difference between harmony and holiness is real, yet not inherently antagonistic.

A Shared Concern: “Christianity feels culturally Western.”

What this concern gets right

Christianity has often been carried through Western political power. That historical reality shapes perception.

What the Open Table does *not* do

It does not equate Christianity with Western culture.
It does not claim civilizational superiority.
It does not assume that spiritual depth belongs to one hemisphere.

Clarification

Christianity predates modern Western categories.
It arose in the Middle East.
It spread through Africa, Asia, and Europe long before modern geopolitics.

The Gospel is not owned by a culture, even if cultures have misused it.

Where Disagreement Remains

This document does not attempt to reconcile:

- Personal vs. impersonal ultimate reality
- Linear vs. cyclical time
- Incarnation vs. realization
- Grace vs. enlightenment
- Resurrection vs. release

These differences are foundational.

The Open Table does not hide them. It invites conversation despite them.

A Word of Posture

The Open Table does not approach Eastern traditions as inferior.
It does not romanticize them either.

It recognizes discipline, contemplation, and seriousness wherever they appear—and it speaks from Christian conviction w

Invitation does not erase difference.
It simply removes hostility from the space where difference exists.

Closing Orientation for This Section

Truth, if it is truth, does not fear philosophy.
Faith, if it is faith, does not require insult.

The Open Table seeks to meet long-standing traditions with humility strong enough to speak clearly and listen patiently.

VI. Concerns from Indigenous and Animist Traditions

This section addresses concerns that may arise from readers shaped by Indigenous spiritual traditions or animist worldvie

These concerns cannot be treated as purely theological. They are historical, cultural, and lived.

Any Christian invitation that ignores that reality is not serious.

A Foundational Concern: “Christianity erased us.”

What this concern gets right

In many places, Christianity arrived alongside political conquest.
Mission was often entangled with empire.
Languages were suppressed.
Sacred practices were outlawed.
Children were separated from families.

These are not accusations invented by critics. They are historical realities in many regions.

Christian institutions have at times participated in cultural harm.

That truth must be acknowledged without qualification.

What the Open Table does *not* do

It does not:
- deny historical wounds
- minimize suffering
- equate missionary work with purity of intent
- ask Indigenous communities to forget the past for the sake of dialogue

Clarification

Christianity must be judged not only by its failures, but by Christ Himself.

The misuse of Christian authority does not define Christ’s character.
Colonial domination is not identical to the Gospel.

Acknowledging harm is not weakness. It is fidelity to truth.

Concern: “You are asking us to abandon our ancestors.”

What this concern gets right

In many Indigenous traditions:
- ancestors are honored, not erased
- land is sacred, not merely property
- community precedes individual identity

Conversion has often been framed as rejection of ancestral wisdom rather than transformation within it.

That framing has caused rupture.

What the Open Table does *not* do

It does not:
- mock ancestral reverence
- treat Indigenous spirituality as superstition
- assume ignorance where there is depth

Clarification

Christianity does not teach contempt for ancestry.
It teaches that all ancestors, like all people, stand before God.

Christian belief does not require cultural annihilation. It does not require the destruction of language, art, or memory. Whe

The difference between honoring ancestors and worshiping them is a theological difference—but that difference must be

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Concern: “Christianity replaces relationship with land with abstraction.”

What this concern gets right

Many Indigenous traditions experience:
- land as living
- creation as relational
- nature as sacred presence

Western Christianity has often been presented in ways that separate humanity from creation, reducing land to resource ra

That distortion is real.

What the Open Table does *not* do

It does not deny the sacredness of creation.
It does not reduce the world to material utility.
It does not dismiss animist perception as childish.

Clarification

Christianity affirms that creation is not divine—but it is not disposable.

The earth is not God, but it is God’s.
Creation is not an illusion, nor is it accidental.

The Christian difference lies not in desacralizing the world, but in distinguishing Creator from creation.

That distinction will not persuade everyone—but it need not be hostile.

Concern: “Dialogue has often meant assimilation.”

What this concern gets right

In many contexts, dialogue was not mutual.
It was hierarchical.
It was structured around compliance.

That history cannot be ignored.

What the Open Table does *not* do

It does not assume superiority of culture.
It does not treat Indigenous traditions as incomplete Europeans.
It does not demand assimilation as proof of sincerity.

Clarification

The Open Table invites conversation without requiring cultural surrender.

Christian faith is not identical to any one civilization. It is not Western property. It is not European by nature.

Where Christianity has been used to enforce uniformity, it betrayed its own universality.

Concern: “Why should we trust Christian invitation at all?”

What this concern gets right

Trust must be earned.
It cannot be demanded.

Given history, suspicion is understandable.

Clarification

The Open Table does not demand trust.
It offers presence.

Trust, if it comes, must come slowly—through listening, consistency, and humility.

Christian witness is not validated by speed of conversion, but by resemblance to Christ.

Where Difference Remains

This document does not attempt to reconcile:

- Creator vs. sacred cosmos
- Worship vs. reverence
- Monotheism vs. spiritual plurality

- Historical revelation vs. ancestral continuity

These differences are real and enduring.

The Open Table does not erase them. It seeks to remove hostility from their discussion.

A Word of Posture

The Open Table does not approach Indigenous traditions as primitive.
It does not romanticize them as pure.
It does not treat them as museum artifacts.

It recognizes living communities shaped by memory and resilience.

Invitation does not erase identity.
It simply opens space where encounter can occur without domination.

Closing Orientation for This Section

Reconciliation requires more than theology.
It requires humility.

The Open Table cannot undo history.
It can only refuse to repeat it.

VII. Concerns from Atheist Readers

This section addresses concerns likely to arise from readers who do not believe in God, reject organized religion, or ident

These concerns are often philosophical rather than emotional. They arise from commitments to reason, evidence, autono

They deserve to be engaged without caricature.

Concern 1: “This is covert evangelism.”

What this concern gets right

Christian faith includes hope that others come to share it.
To deny that would be dishonest.

Religious dialogue has sometimes been framed as conversation while secretly functioning as strategy. Suspicion is under

What the Open Table does *not* do

It does not:
- disguise its Christian identity
- pretend neutrality
- deny that Christians believe Christ is true
- require agreement as a condition of respect

Clarification

An invitation is not a trap.

The Open Table is explicit that it is written from Christian conviction. It does not conceal that conviction. It also does not m

Hope for conversion and coercion are not the same thing.

The difference lies in posture.

Concern 2: “Why involve religion at all?”

What this concern gets right

Many atheists believe:
- moral life does not require belief in God
- meaning can be constructed without transcendence
- religion has historically caused harm
- secular governance protects pluralism

These positions are not irrational. They are serious philosophical conclusions.

What the Open Table does *not* claim
It does not claim:

- atheists cannot be moral
- meaning is impossible without faith
- doubt is intellectual laziness
- religion is inherently superior to secular thought

Clarification

The Open Table does not begin from the assumption that atheism is ignorance. It begins from the recognition that disagre

It invites conversation not because atheism is absurd, but because the question of whether ultimate reality is personal, im

The document assumes that conversation about that question is worthwhile—even when resolution does not occur.

Concern 3: “Faith is presented as virtuous without evidence.”

What this concern gets right

Belief without examination is dangerous.
Appeals to mystery can mask intellectual evasion.
Claims about reality require coherence.

Atheist critique has often sharpened religious thinking by demanding rigor.

What the Open Table does *not* do

It does not:
- present faith as blind
- dismiss scientific inquiry
- treat reason as the enemy of belief
- ask readers to suspend critical thought

Clarification

Christian faith historically engaged philosophy, science, and logic rather than fleeing from them.

Faith, in Christian understanding, is not the absence of reason. It is trust grounded in claims about reality. Those claims n

The Open Table does not attempt to prove God. It also does not treat disbelief as proof of superiority.

Concern 4: “Religion has caused more harm than good.”

What this concern gets right

Religious institutions have:
- justified violence
- supported oppression
- resisted reform
- failed morally in visible and devastating ways
These failures cannot be dismissed as minor anomalies.

What the Open Table does *not* do

It does not deny harm.
It does not excuse abuse.
It does not romanticize religious history.

Clarification

The misuse of religion does not settle the question of whether God exists.

Human failure within religion does not logically invalidate metaphysical claims about reality.

The Open Table acknowledges that religion has harmed. It also recognizes that religion has inspired sacrifice, charity, an

The moral record of humanity—religious and secular alike—is mixed.

Concern 5: “Why assume transcendence rather than material sufficiency?”

What this concern gets right

Many atheists are satisfied with:
- naturalistic explanations
- materialist frameworks
- humanistic ethics
- evolutionary accounts of consciousness

These frameworks can be internally coherent.

What the Open Table does *not* do

It does not claim that naturalism is foolish.
It does not treat skepticism as moral rebellion.
It does not reduce disbelief to trauma or anger.

Clarification

The Christian claim is not that material explanations are useless. It is that they are incomplete.

Where atheism sees sufficiency in matter and process, Christianity sees contingency and gift.

The Open Table does not attempt to settle that debate. It invites conversation across it.

Where Disagreement Remains

This document does not attempt to reconcile:

- Theism and atheism
- Revelation and skepticism
- Miracles and methodological naturalism

- Resurrection and material finality

These disagreements are structural.

Dialogue does not erase them. It clarifies them.

A Word on Doubt

Doubt is not treated here as failure.

In Christian tradition, doubt has often preceded deeper faith. It has also preceded continued disbelief.

The Open Table respects intellectual honesty, even when it leads away from its conclusions.

A Word of Posture

The Open Table does not approach atheists as adversaries.
It does not presume hidden motives.
It does not claim moral superiority.

It simply refuses to treat disbelief as beyond conversation.

Invitation is not domination.
Disagreement is not dehumanization.

Closing Orientation for This Section

If God exists, conversation cannot threaten Him.
If God does not exist, conversation cannot create Him.

Either way, respectful dialogue between believers and non-believers strengthens intellectual and moral integrity.

The Open Table seeks that integrity.